



A VISIT TO THE THARRATS FOUNDATION FOR THE GRAPHIC ARTS

JOAN JOSEP THARRATS, A PAINTER BORN IN GIRONA IN 1918, HAS ALWAYS STOOD OUT FOR HIS WORK IN FAVOUR OF THE AVANT-GARDES, WHICH HE HAS CARRIED OUT BOTH FROM THE PICTORIAL ANGLE AND AS AN ART CRITIC, PUBLISHER, POET AND PROMOTER OF CULTURE. IN DECEMBER 1990, THE TOWN HALL OF PINEDA DE MAR, IN THE CATALAN REGION OF MARESME, OPENED THE THARRATS FOUNDATION, A PUBLIC MUNICIPAL FOUNDATION SET UP BY THE ARTIST AND INTENDED TO PRESERVE HIS WORK AND ORGANISE RELATED ACTIVITIES OF ALL SORTS, WITH A SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE GRAPHIC ARTS.



THE THARRATS FOUNDATION FOR THE GRAPHIC ARTS. PINEDA DE MAR

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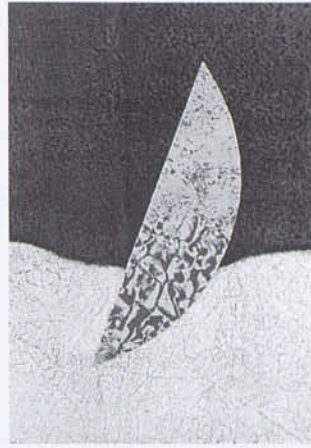
The graphic work collected at the Tharrats Foundation stems from experiments the artist carried out from 1957 on. The first lithograph we come across is *Homenatge a Cousteau*. Unlike most of his painting and graphic work, in which the forms seem to be suspended in space, here they become a shower of red dots, with further black and white dots, on a blue background. This is also true of *Moment musical*, from the

same year, where we also see yellow dots on a purple background which is no more than hinted at, and where everything seems to be spinning in a whirlpool. The highly experimental nature of 1957 is confirmed in other lithographs with powerful black curved and straight lines, which tend towards circularity and show the mark of action. This gesturalism and the obvious importance it gives to black is in fact characteristic of all his periods,

and is decisive in classifying Tharrats as an expressionist –an expressionist painter and engraver, but in his own way, as an expression of particular personal inclinations, with little connection with the historical trends that receive this name. Engravings are always sufficiently important to be looked at separately. But they are also interesting, especially in this case, because they allow us an overall approach to the whole of his work. The



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THARRATS. QUART CREIXENT, LITHOGRAPH

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world of Tharrats has since 1960 been the result of an explosion. At the centre of the canvas or paper we find the nucleus of a body which disintegrates and scatters its energy throughout space. An obvious example is the 1961 lithograph *Three body problem*. The composition or situation of the forms brings forth the idea of a cosmic evocation, something almost inevitable today. This isn't the serene, harmonious sky that so impressed Kant and the romantic poets and philosophers who came after him, in the same way as it has probably impressed poets and lovers throughout the ages. In outer space, which has begun to be explored by astronauts like Charles Conrad, with whom Tharrats was photographed at Cape Kennedy in 1966, not everything is harmony; on a different scale, the same tensions and struggles are taking place there as in our urban jungle. In this respect, and undoubtedly in others, Tharrats is a realist painter and engraver.

His background is familiar enough not to have to go into it in detail here. What I want to do is to look at his valuable help in putting art within reach of the public. His contribution is the Tharrats Foundation for the Graphic Arts, founded by the artist in the town of Pineda de Mar in 1990 and containing a large collection of his lithographs, silk-screen prints, etchings and other work on paper donated by him, as well as a large number of lithographs and prints using different techniques by artists from different countries. This work is a reflection of Tharrats's interest in other artists' work as well as of his generosity. He is an artist open to

other types of art, however different from his own. It was because of this interest that, before becoming an artist, he started on what today is a quite remarkable collection of specialist books and magazines. It's worth stressing the variety and quality of the other artists represented at the Foundation. Starting with Picasso, the list contains almost 150 names from 16 countries, amongst them such distinguished ones as Broto, Mary Callery, Cavalcanti, Clavé, Cuixart, Dalí, Sonia Delaunay, Marcel Duchamp, Angel Ferrant, Guinovart, Richard Hamilton, Erich Heckel, Iturrino, Wifredo Lam, Roberto Matta, Henry Moore, Ràfols Casamada, Rouault, Sempere, Subirachs, Tàpies, Vostell and Zadkine. In the catalogue, published when the collection was presented in Pineda, Tharrats speaks of "all the adventures" that can take place "on the minute desert of a blank sheet of paper": "the incisive line of the chisel ... the velvety tones of the silk-screen print, the material gradations of the etching, the descriptive meanderings of lino, the powerful imprints of the woodcut".

Getting back to Tharrats's own work again, we must not forget that there are realist references that have never left him. I don't mean just the symbolologies, such as the cosmic symbolologies. His graphic work contains clearly represented human figures – a 1966 *Self-portrait*, the image of Copernicus in the 1975 *Homage to him*, the interior of a human body in another homage dedicated to *Vesalius* that same year –, eyes, leaves, the signs of the zodiac in the series on this subject, various elements from the Calvary in the series *Camí de la Creu*. But the concep-

tion is always abstract, not only in the sense that the art of all ages has been abstract, but also in what we can look on as the dominant trend of our age.

As in all true art, we see a powerful tension here, on several levels. In particular I would like to point out the tension created between what, in a further reference to the cosmos, we could call entropy, which boils down to a constant loss of life breath, and the opposing force which drives everything forward. The geometric forms that appear so often in this work, in his paintings and reliefs, speak to us, in their crystallization, of life aspiring to its maximum realization. But at the same time it constitutes a danger: in a way it connotes death, that which being perfect has nothing ahead of it. For this reason, Tharrats, without rationally planning to – such is the intuition of the artist –, introduces the principle of vivifying chaos stirring things up once again. The bright colours converge, without mixing, on the blacks; the geometric forms clash with the churning waters of the blues and whites, the vitality of the reds, the serenity of the ochres, the softness of the pinks. Often, blue shines in the background and at the top, as though this were trying to tell us something in particular. Suddenly, the abstract language could not be more obviously realist, as in *Flaire de paisatge empordanès*, from 1988, the final work with which the collection originally ended. As a compendium of all his graphic work, it's like a direct continuation of those first undertakings of 1957, a shower of dynamic and harmonious colours, with the same fluidity and creativity. ■